

# Oxford City take the Boxing Day points

Wycombe Wanderers 2, Oxford City 3

**F**OR the thousands of fans who make the weekly trek to Loakes Park, the prospect of a Wanderers' home win is fast becoming something of a rarity. It is now nine weeks since Wycombe last won a match on their home territory—when Barking were defeated 5-2 on October 24—and their Boxing Day performance against old rivals, Oxford City, gave little hope of an immediate solution to the problem which now faces the team. But to be fair to the club, only four matches have been played at home during this period.

That problem is, of course, how can the Wanderers stop conceding goals? In their last three matches the Wycombe rearguard have let through a total of 12.

While the defence crumples the forwards are always struggling to put the team on level terms. They have not had the luxury for some-time now of trying to establish a lead.

Not that the forwards are entirely blameless. Against Oxford in the opening ten minutes, Wycombe held the territorial advantage but could not put the finishing touch to their approach-work. Oxford came prepared for trouble. They pulled inside-left Metcalfe back into the defence to act as a 'sweeper up' behind centre-half Shufflebotham.

## 4-3-3 POLICY

Using a 4-3-3 formation City's front three of Morton, Woodley and Gaffel moved dangerously often upsetting Wycombe's defence, which stands far too square and is split time and again by a quick pass down the middle.

The Wanderers forwards do not seem to possess the capability or the intuition to switch the pattern of play. This manoeuvre can be done by sending a long-pass cross-field in the opposite direction to which the move is building-up.

On one occasion, in the 60th minute, Samuels actually switched the direction of play by finding Holmes, on the left wing, with a long pass from the right of the field.

But on the whole the Wycombe forwards lacked any fresh ideas on how to break down a packed rearguard. Horseman was unlucky to see his early effort charged down on the line, but generally Tony was lying far too deep to cause the City defence any concern.

Wycombe fell behind in the 21st minute when Vince Faulkner conceded a penalty. City's left-winger Morton strayed over on to the right flank, and as he moved into the box Faulkner came into the tackle leaving one leg trailing which upended Morton. Jackson took the spot-kick just managing to squeeze the ball past Maskell's outstretched hand via the left hand post.

It was Morton who set-up City's second goal, again, after he had switched wings with Hellyer. Faulkner committed himself too early, Rundle in trying to cover could not cut out Morton's pass which found Hellyer completely unmarked. He put the visitors in a commanding position after 28 minutes.

Although Wanderers still had a large amount of territorial advantage this is exactly the way Oxford planned the game. Their well-drilled forwards could spring-board into attack from depth, and against a brittle defence such as Wycombe's this move worked perfectly.

Horseman still continued to be Wycombe's most dangerous attacker, and Shippey did well to reach a well-flighted free-kick from the 25-yard mark. But the rest of his colleagues displayed a reluctance to try their luck in front of goal, too often teeing the ball up for one another inside the penalty area!

## BRAVE SOLO DASH

Five minutes before the break Merrick, who up to that moment had had a quiet match, made a brave solo dash but allowed the ball to run too far in front of him and Shippey was out to smother the chance.

Oxford increased their lead in the 71st minute, after a spell of Wycombe domination which fizzled out in a couple of weak shots from Samuels and Merrick.

A glorious through ball from Bradbury split the Wycombe defence and Woodley streaked clear to fire a drive past the advancing Maskell from an acute angle.

The visitors, seemingly content with their lead, concentrated on the defensive aspect of the game and, quite rightly, paid the penalty in the 81st minute.

Baker clipped a cross into the area, Merrick headed on and there was Samuels diving forward to nod the ball past the stranded Shippey.

For the remaining nine minutes Wycombe seized control. Merrick had a wonderful opportunity of scoring but his point-blank header brought a tremendous split-second reflex save from Shippey.

On the stroke of time Horseman found some space in which to work on the right of the City area, and his cross reached the leaping Samuels who headed into the net to make the score-line look a little more respectable.

**Wycombe**—J. Maskell; J. Beck, I. Rundle; B. Baker, V. Faulkner, C. Gale; P. Davies, K. Samuels, L. Merrick, A. Horseman, S. Holmes.